



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **Snohomish dairy lagoon breach prompts multi-agency response**

**OLYMPIA** – A 21 million gallon capacity dairy waste lagoon has failed, releasing an unknown quantity of manure into farm fields near the town of Snohomish. The manure has filtered through the fields, reaching French Slough and the Snohomish River.

The state departments of Agriculture, Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other state and local agencies are responding.

The dairy, Bartelheimer Brothers, is cooperating in efforts to mitigate environmental damage by attempting to stop further pollution and applying the remaining spilled waste on area fields. The farm is milking 750 dairy cows and farms 600 acres of corn and hay for cattle feed.

“We’re doing everything we can to respond to this lagoon failure,” said Jason Bartelheimer. “The farm has additional manure storage capacity, which we will rely on during this immediate response period. Our goal is prevent further manure run off into French Slough.”

The state Department of Health is closely monitoring the situation. It appears no public drinking water supplies are affected. Snohomish Health District is urging the public to avoid contact with the Snohomish River.

Cow manure is likely to contain E. coli bacteria, which can cause people to become ill. Symptoms, including diarrhea, stomach cramps, vomiting, and/or fever, may appear as early as a few hours to several days after infection. If you become ill with these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is assessing impacts on fish populations. Fishing is not currently open in the Snohomish River.

The lagoon was constructed to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) standards in 1997 and permitted by Ecology’s Dam Safety Office. The dike is 15 feet tall and the lagoon bottom is five feet below ground level. The basin is 580 feet diameter. The breach was more than 30 feet wide, draining the lagoon of all its contents above ground level.

The dairy's latest routine dairy nutrient management inspection conducted by WSDA in April 2009 revealed only minor issues that were subsequently addressed.

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NRCS and Ecology have visited the site and have begun an investigation to determine the cause of the lagoon failure.

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